Applications of the Reggio Emilia Approach to U. S. Early Childhood Education Classroom

Dolores Stegelin

February 14, 2012
Key Concepts of the Reggio Emilia Approach

- The child is a capable learner with great potential for thought and creativity.

- Children express themselves through “a hundred languages”—in diverse voices and ways.

- Relationships within the Reggio Emilia schools are critical to creating a positive environment.
Key Concepts of the Reggio Emilia Approach

• Teachers, parents, and children work together collaboratively and as co-investigators.

• The arts are integrated throughout the curriculum.

• Documentation is elaborate and takes on many avenues: photography, portfolios, oral and written expression, and products made by the children.
History of the Reggio Emilia Schools of Northern Italy

• Began after WWII in the city of Reggio Emilia, Italy, north of Milan. Built with proceeds from the sale of a tank, trucks, and some horses.

• Dr. Loris Malaguzzi and a group of parents conceived the new schools for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

• Existental beginning to help the Reggio Emilia community rebuild from the ashes of the war. Gave hope to the surviving families.
• Based on theories of Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, Gardner, and others.

• Constructivist approach in which children are empowered and encouraged to explore their world and create meanings.

• The schools are closely integrated into the community and supported financially by the city.
Descriptors of the Programs

• Infant/toddler centers for children birth to age three

• Preschools for children age three to six (kindergartens)

• Education and care are considered necessary to provide a high-quality, full-day program.
Descriptors of the Programs

- Children from all SES levels are included, with an emphasis on children with special needs.
- Combines the social services with education, an approach widely accepted in Italy.
- In Reggio Emilia, 95% of preschool-age children are enrolled in school.
Growth in the United States

- The Reggio Emilia Approach was brought to the U.S. in the early 1990s by NAEYC and the University of Massachusetts.

- The approach is influencing many early childhood programs in the U.S. but is not seen as a model to be replicated.

- Some key concepts of Reggio Emilia originated in the U.S. and are familiar to U.S. educators.
Specific Applications to US Schools

• View of the child as a learner

• Staff development is more systematic and collaborative

• Cooperation is seen as the foundation of learning; relationships are a focal point
Specific Applications to US Schools

- Parent involvement is more integrated and in-depth.
- Documentation of children’s work is becoming more elaborate and diverse.
- Project Work encourages in-depth exploration of fewer topics.
- Integration of the arts throughout
View of the Child as a Learner

- Viewed as highly competent
- Child needs individualized pacing of learning
- Appreciation of the unique interests and skills of each child
Staff Development

• Egalitarian roles of teachers

• Planned and regular staff development in the schools

• Relationships are very important
Project Work

- Learning is best when reflective and in-depth
- Project work engages all children in small and individual group work
- Projects are displayed and used for assessment purposes
- Projects stem from the children’s interests
Documentation of Children’s Work

- Technology is used to capture the learning process
- Digital photographs used extensively
- Sequential photos to capture a process
- Portfolios and panels displayed in classrooms
Parent Involvement and Engagement in the School

- Volunteers
- Decision makers
- Contribute to the curriculum
- Co-teachers
- Close relationships with the teachers
- Supports project work and documentation
Integration of the Arts

- Music and movement
- Songs and poetry
- Drama
- Creativity
- The arts:
  - Painting
  - Drawing
  - Representation of many forms
Conversation

• Explore concepts that you could use in your setting.
  – Parent involvement
  – Documentation
  – Staff development
  – Learning environments
  – Curriculum
Contact Information

• Dolores A. Stegelin, Ph.D.
• 401A Tillman Hall
• Clemson University
• Clemson, SC 29634-0705
• 864.656.0327
• dstegel@clemson.edu